

NEWS FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



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**MOUNTAIN DAIRY IN MANSFIELD TAKES FIRST STEP TOWARD
PRESERVING MORE THAN 700 ACRES OF FARMLAND**

(MANSFIELD, CT) More than 82 acres of one of the largest Connecticut dairy farms to produce, process and distribute its own milk has been permanently protected and will be forever available for agricultural production under the state's Farmland Preservation Program.

The 243-year-old Stearns Farm in Mansfield, which sells its products under the Mountain Dairy brand, is also seeking approval to protect another 650 acres of its farm under the program, administered by the Department of Agriculture.

Key partners in the conveyance of the farms' development rights to the state were the USDA/ Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Town of Mansfield.

At an announcement held today at the farm, Agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky said it is an important addition to the program, which has preserved 314 farms and more than 41,500 acres through conveyance of development rights to the state.

Mountain Dairy products can be found in stores, restaurants and schools throughout eastern Connecticut and the greater Hartford area.

“Mountain Dairy and the Stearns family have stood apart as a family-owned enterprise that has contributed greatly to the local community and the regional economy,” Reviczky said.

“Working with our partners, the Town of Mansfield and the USDA/NRCS, I am confident we will continue our commitment to protect this working landscape.”

Ten generations of the Stearns family have been actively involved in the farm, known as a “producer-handler” operation because it raises hay and corn to feed its dairy cows, processes its own milk and delivers it to their customers.

Conveying the farm’s development rights to the state will help ensure that it remains 100-percent family owned and viable for future generations, said Josh Stearns, a member of the family’s tenth generation and one of seven Stearns currently working the land.

“This place was here a long time before me and I hope it’s here a long time after me,” he said. “It’s important that we keep the legacy going.”

The Stearns family has farmed the land since 1772, when Boaz and Lydia Stearns settled on the farm and raised mulberries for the region’s silk industry.

The family eventually switched to the milk business and began using the name Mountain Dairy in 1871, when Jared Stearns started selling milk to his neighbors and friends.

The farm is the third preserved in Mansfield through the Farmland Preservation Program, which has protected a total of more than 4,400 acres of farmland in Tolland County.

It is also the fourth farm across the state protected in recent months through a partnership between the state Dept. of Agriculture and USDA/NRCS.

“The partnership between NRCS and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture is beginning to be like a well-oiled machine,” said NRCS State Conservationist Thomas L. Morgart. “These easements not only benefit the landowner, they’re advantageous to residents by ensuring environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat, and protecting open space.”

U.S. Representative Joe Courtney (CT-2), whose district includes Mansfield, said:

“I have had the pleasure of working with Mountain Dairy in the past, along with a number of dairy farms that form the fabric of our region during my service on the House Agriculture Committee and having launched the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus. I strongly endorse Mountain Dairy’s inclusion in the state’s Farmland Preservation Program, and I am heartened that this unique asset will be protected for generations to come.”

State Representative Gregory Haddad (D-Mansfield), recalled how his family got twice-a-week home deliveries from the dairy when he was growing up.

“They are a historic gem in Eastern Connecticut and also an important part of our small business and agricultural community,” Haddad said. “I am so pleased that the Department of Agriculture and Mountain Dairy are able to partner together to ensure that the farm can continue running for years to come.”

Matt Hart, Mansfield’s Town Manager, said Mountain Dairy is the oldest farm in town and is a key part of the town’s identity.

“The community values the scenic views of the farm and benefits from Mountain Dairy’s local milk and other products,” Hart said. “We look forward to working with Mountain Dairy to help their business thrive.”